The Loving Christ April 7, 1966 Maundy Thursday John 13 -selected

In his commentary on our scripture lesson this evening, Arthur John Gossip speculates that the twelve disciples were anything but peacelful and loving when they gathered in the upper room to celebrate the passover with their master. The mounting tension of the week in Jerusalem was beginning to take its toll. Four short days before Jesus had entered the city in the midst of loud and enthusiatic accolades. It seemed inevitble that he would be king, or at least recognized as a great prophet before long. But to their dismay events had taken the opposite direction. Animosity had replaced adultion: the powers that be were solidly against him: trouble was brewing and they knew it. Judas had already made arrangements to betray him at the opportune time: perhaps they sensed an uneasy guilt about him. In any case, they entered the upper room, tense, tired, worried and irritable.

Thus they neglected to wash each other's feet, as was the custom. Gossip has one of them say: "Sitting at his right hand and left hand indeed. and not a thought about what I gave up. They'll sit there long enought until I wash their feet." I.B.

So it was that during the meal, Jesus - sensing the unrest and uneasiness, got up from the tble and himself, washed their feet - everyone of them - Peter who protested and even Judas. (K) (R insert

Something terribly real about the law of love

The first observtion I want to make about this incident is the reality of Christ's love. Last evening we thought about the horrible relaity of his suffering: this evening I want to draw your attention to the tangible authenticity of his love. His was no Platonic love - unconnected to the commonality of life. It ws no intellectual love that existed in the mind. It was a real love: a love that reached out to the scorned Prostitute - the unwelcome publican: a love that knelt down and washed the dirt off the feet of 12 men, one of whom was about to betray him; another of whom would deny him and the rest of whom would abndon him. This is the kind of love he had for them.

And then, sensing that there was little more time left, he turned this little ritual into an object lesson. "I give you a new commandment. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you are to love one another. If there is this love among you, thenall will know that you are my disciples."

The term Maundy Thursday comes from the Latin 'Mandatum', meaning commandment - and this is what the church has wanted to remember about the last supper. It was the setting for the new and greatest and final commandment: Love one another.

The ten commandments, standing as the basis of the Law of Moses, had given form and order to the nation's life for centuries. Now Jesus was amending the list - adding another that in his words fulfilled all the rest. Of the ten commandments eight are negtive: 'Thou shalt not': One has to do with remebering the sabbath and the other honoring your Mother and Father. But now Jesus was saying that all of these were encompassed in the new commandment: all of them and more. For if we are honest about the Gospel we know that a man can keep the tem commandments and not be a Christin. He can, and all of us have at one time or another, broken one or another to some degree, and still be a Christian. He cnnot, however, disregrd this one - this commnd to love - and seriously consider himself to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The fact that Christianity down through the cneturies has staryed from the fundamental New testment teaching is unfortunate. The fact that today a Christian is frequently measured by what he doesn't do - rather than by the love that he actively expresses is a sinful and fatal flaw in our religion.

But assuming we do take this seriously, assuming we do understand our discipleship in terms of loving one nnother - how do we go about it? How do we go about loving someone who rubs us the wrong way - someone who offends our sensitivities: much less someone who is an avowed enamy? It's not an easy question - and obvioulsy the answer does not lie in just trying harder.

resume here

The great ehtical philosopher, Emmaneel Kant, thought that loving other men was a matter of will and self discipline. He went further and said that truly ethical love was always a matter of self control and will power. = to which his friendly critic Schiller replied: 'I dearly love my friends, but unfortunately I do so only because I feel inclined. It vexes me that I am not ehtical.' (!)

We all know the difficulty of loving someone our whole being finds repeelent. We know also the shallow hypocricy of people who try too hard to love. We know the paternalistic

condescension of the man who feels he is winning his way into heaven by loving/ and we personally, rebel at the thought of loving someone we cnnot stand.

The trouble lies in the way we see other men. The ability to love does not come from the will alone - but from a different view of the other man. Traditionally we have been taught to regard other people in terms of their utility. We value a man for the tasks he can perform: for his worth in the market place of life. We are stingy with our love: bestowing only on thosw who are worthy of it. We love other people when they are attractive and charming and when they love us. That is, our love is quite contingemt, quite dependent on the other person per se, and what he can do directly and indirectly, for us. Because of this we can be picky: we can affirm our love for humanity at a distance and find that there are a very few men whom we really love.

In the Book, All Quiet on the Westenr Front, there is a remarkable illustration of how the relationship betweenn two men can change when one sees the other apart from his utility and function. During an assault, a Germn soldier jumped into a shell hole, and was startled to find it wiredy occupied by an Englishman. Startled and not knowing what to do in the extremely dose quarters he paused for a second, long enough to notice that the Englishman was severly wounded. He was profoundly touched nd gave the man a drink out of hbs canteen and the man gve him a look of gratitude. Then the Englishman indicated that he wanted him to open his breast pocket. He did so and out fell pictures of his family. The German soldier cradled his hed in his arm, and as he died held up before him the picture of his wife and children. [1]

The remarkable thing about this ittle scene is tht for a moment one man broke through the stricity utilitarian wyy of seeing another man. At first he saw only the wearer of a uniform - an enemy he had been trained to hate and kill without mercy. But suddenly, almost miraculously, he saw him as something else - as an indivdual with a family: a man with children who loved and missed him. For a moment in time, New testament love broke through and became a reality among men.

The famous German preacher and theologian, Helmuth Thielicke, calls this other way of seeing men their "alien dignity" and movingly tells a story about it from his own expeirience. As a boy in school, he and several of his friends planned to ambush and beat an other boy they deeply disliked because of his snobbishness. But about the time when this was to take place he saw the boy's father bringing him to school: they saw how they walked together, how the father patted him on the head - how they waved good bye as they parted at the gate. Suddenly it dawned on the ambushers that this boy was loved by this man - and this made a difference in him: it gave him an alien dignity. In Thieleicke's words "the splendor of another's love lay around him."

We ought to understand that by ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ themselves, very few men will earn our love. We ought to admit that if all we have to offer is ourselves, our personal appearence, our capabilities, our habits and idiocyncracies - we will earn the love of precious few. (2) Furthermore we ought to see the basic wrongness of this whole approach. Pushed to its logical end it makes man foul. It says there is nothing to love in a man unless he produces It ultimately justifies killing the mentally ill, the crippled and hopelessly sick. It is a view of man that produced both Naziism and Communism. And it is a view, that to a lesser extent, infects everyone of us.

At the last supper our Lord washed the feet of the twelve. He washed the feet of Judas who was a despicable betrayer: he washed the feet of Peter whose protestations were greater than his heart: he washed the feet of the other ten who were so cowerdly they would flee at the first sign of trouble. They didn't deserve that love - they should have been dying for him. But he loved them because he saw them differently - he saw beyond the immediacies of their respective strengths and weaknesses. Later he could even look down from the cross and see through the actions of the men who put him there and love them too.

We are moved for unalien affection, all we have seen, for us
= the facts that God loves us - like is our alien dignity

(3)

This is the miracle of Jesus: that he was a loving Christ: that he so loved those twelve: that his was a creative love that later made new men of those twelve. Think of what Peter became: think of what the disciples did - because this man had so loved them.

This is the miracle of the Last Supper: that he so loved those twelve and that he so loves everyman who ever comes to his table. Not that we deserve his love, not for a minute that we are worthy of it - but that he sees us as children of God -- as individuals full of faults and failings, weakness and infidelity - but individuals bathed in the spendor of the love of God.

And to us as we commune - as we receive that love come the words he spoke to them:

"A new commandment I give to you; love one another. Even as I have loved you, so you are to love one another. If there is this love among you, then all will know that you are my disciples."

Amen

Quotes & illus. from Christ & the Meaning of Life. Hal Bartlett

* This is Jesus, a total Holy Week word. Love God & Love, Work, & practice Love.

. All about the Eucharist ought to be said about especially the fourth.